DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 168 SP 035 608

AUTHOR Freiberg, Melissa R.; And Others
TITLE The Anatomy of a Mentoring Program for Beginning Urban Teachers.
PUB DATE Oct 94
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 13, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Beginning Teachers; Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; *Mentors; Principals; Program Evaluation; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Improvement; Teaching Experience; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Protege Mentor Relationship

ABSTRACT

This study outlines and evaluates an urban school district's mentoring program in which 18 veteran teachers are selected to serve as full-time mentors for up to 10 beginning teachers or 4 persons participating in an alternative certification program. Methods of data collection included surveys and focus group interviews with mentor teachers, beginning teachers, building principals, and 10 members of the Mentor Board (comprised of principals, central office personnel, teachers, union officials, and a mentor teacher representative). According to the data analysis, general agreement was reached on the following points: (1) the program demonstrated the district's commitment to supporting beginning teachers; (2) teachers and administrators were willing to allocate resources to fund the project; (3) beginning teachers, mentor teachers, and principals were able to make a direct connection between mentoring novices and better learning for students; (4) mentor teachers considered their clients to be the students as much as or even more than the beginning teachers; (5) the role of the mentor teacher was to provide feedback on teaching performance and class management, and to be a model to follow, a guide through mounds of paperwork, and assurance that all teachers have the same fears and problems. Respondents' comments and nine statistical tables are included. (LL)

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The Anatomy of a Mentoring Program for Beginning Urban Teachers

Melissa R. Freiberg, Ph. D.
John M. Zbikowski, Ph. D.
Tom Ganser, Ph. D.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

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This paper was prepared for presentation at the 1994 Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association meeting (Session T.145.C), Chicago, Illinois, October 13, 1994.

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Tom Ganser, Ph.D.
Office of Field Experiences
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Whitewater, WI 53190-1790
Telephone: (414) 472-1123
FAX: (414) 472-5716
Internet: GanserT@UWWVAX.UWW.EDU

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Perspectives

Since the early 1970's, organized mentoring programs for beginning teachers have proliferated (Furtwengler, 1993). As programs have grown in number and visibility, various formats have emerged. For example, some programs are university based while others are sponsored by a local school district or regional educational agencies. In some cases a mentoring program may be sponsored or even required by the state department of education (Huling-Austin, 1990). Considerable variation also exists with respect to other elements of mentoring programs such as mentor qualifications, incentives, selection, and training; the process of pairing mentors with beginning teachers; delineation of mentor roles and responsibilities; and the definition of intended or expected outcomes.

During the past twenty years, justification for the resources allocated to mentoring activities has expanded from a narrow focus on replacing the "sink or swim" experiences of new teachers (Lortie, 1975; Ryan, 1984) with a mediated entry into the profession, to situating mentoring within the larger contexts of career-long professional development, teacher empowerment, school reform and instructional supervision done by colleagues rather than by administrators. Simultaneously, recent studies of mentoring question the ability of mentoring activities to enhance the skills of beginning teachers given the structure of school and the nature of teaching as an occupation (e.g., Schlechty & Whitford, 1989; Little, 1990; Ashton, 1992).

This study sought to examine an urban mentoring program for beginning teachers from multiple perspectives to answer four questions: 1. How do the participants view their roles and others' roles in the program? 2. How does the format or structure of the program contribute to or hinder successful implementation of the program? 3. What aspects of teaching are most problematic for beginning teachers and does mentoring have an effect on teachers' perceptions of those problem areas? 4. What type of growth, change or self-discovery is evident in the program participants?

The school district studied, Longman Unified School District (a

pseudonym), has an enrollment of approximately 100,000 students and employs approximately 6,000 teachers. In the LUSD Mentor Program eighteen veteran teachers are selected to serve as full-time mentors for up to ten beginning teachers or four persons participating in an alternative certification program with university located in Longman. Mentor teachers serve a multiple year appointment (maximum of three years) and return to a regular teaching assignment at the end of their appointment. The Mentor Program represents a high degree of collaboration between the school administration and the teachers' union. The LUSD Mentor Teacher Program began in January, 1992, and has continued ever since then.

Data Sources

This report is based on data collected between February, 1992, and May, 1994, by the following means:

1. surveys of beginning teachers administered in May of each year. Note: In this report, "beginning teacher" corresponds to LUSD's term "new hire." For the 1992 data, beginning teachers may have had five years of previous teaching experience in other school districts or in LUSD (e.g., as a substitute teacher). For the 1993 and 1994 data, most beginning teachers had little or no previous experience.
2. focus group interviews of mentored beginning teachers in May of 1992.
3. surveys of building principals administered in May of each year.
4. telephone interviews of building principals in June of 1992.
5. interviews of mentor teachers in February and May of 1992.
6. questionnaires of mentor teachers administered in May of 1993 and 1994.
7. interviews with ten members of the Mentor Board in May of 1992.

Quantitative survey data were subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis using SAS (Statistical Analysis System). Interview data and responses to open-ended survey items were analyzed for emergent categories

following procedures described by Lofland and Lofland (1984) and Goetz and LeCompte (1984). The Ethnograph, (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988), a computer program for the analysis of qualitative data, was used to facilitate the coding of interview segments, and the sorting and retrieval of coded segments. These data were compared across years and subjects where possible.

Beginning Teachers

This section of the paper reports on findings based on one or two open-ended questions on the survey of beginning teachers. In the 1992 and 1993 surveys, teachers were asked to respond to the following prompt: "Use the space below to provide any other information about your experiences as a beginning teacher in Longman Unified School District." In the 1994 survey, teachers were asked to respond to this prompt and to a second prompt. The second prompt for beginning teachers identified by LUSD as having worked with a mentor teacher in the Mentor Program was "Would your year have been different if you had not worked with a Mentor Teacher? Please explain." The second prompt for beginning teachers identified by LUSD as <u>not</u> having worked with a mentor teacher in the Mentor Program was "Do you think your year would have been different if you had worked with a LUSD/ULTU [United Longman

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Insert Table 1 about here

Teachers' Union] Mentor Teacher? Please explain." The number of respondents for the one prompt (1992 and 1993) and one or both of the prompts (1994) is reported in Table 1.

<u>Perceived Problems</u>

An analysis of the beginning teachers' responses to the survey's open ended item(s) was conducted to determine their perceptions of problems encountered during the preceding academic year. In many respects, what LUSD beginning teachers reported as the typical sources of work-related problems reflects previous studies of beginning teachers (e.g., Veenman, 1984). This is especially true with respect to classroom management and discipline, and

the student characteristics (motivation, behavior, etc.). One high school

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Insert Table 2 about here

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teacher's comments capture how shocking this can be for a beginning teacher:

> Coming from an educational setting outside the U. S., where there was a great respect for teachers, I was unprepared for the disciplinary problems which I have faced this year. The students lack self-motivation, respect and are verbally abusive not only to the teacher but to each other. (1993-#135-H-Reg)

(Note: citations for excerpts from the surveys include the year, the survey ID number, the respondent's teaching assignment [E = Elementary School, M = Middle School, H = High School, O = Other], and whether the respondent was assigned to regular classes [Reg] or special education classes [Spe].) At the same time, a small number of respondents cited a problem that is true for LUSD but not for most school districts: a residency requirement that obligates newly hired teachers to reside in the city served by LUSD.

Several of the problems frequently described by LUSD beginning teachers may be more directly to teaching in a large, urban school district than to teaching in general. One example of this is what some respondents believed to be serious deficiencies in the LUSD's procedures for determining teaching assignments. Specifically, 14% of respondents criticized when they first learned about their teaching assignment or when they began it. For example, one high school teacher wrote, "LUSD's hiring timeframe [sic] is <u>ridiculous</u>. Waiting until August before offering contracts is bad policy. Most teachers know their assignments in May, in other school districts" (1992-#333-HS-Reg). Most of the respondents having negative comments about this topic suggested that they were unaware of their teaching assignment until shortly before they began it or that the assignment began after the beginning of the school year. For example, one respondent wrote, "LUSD gave me my placement 2 days before school started in a grade I had no clue what to do with" (1993-#154-E-Reg).

Respondents' dissatisfaction about <u>when</u> they first learned about their assignment or when it began is related to a second area of dissatisfaction among LUSD beginning teachers: teaching assignments "outside their area." Regarding this subject, one high school teacher wrote:

> Switching schools on the second day of school because central office was behind in paper work made it very difficult the 1st 7 weeks. I also was teaching outside my area with very little idea what the curriculum of the class (study skills) should be. (1992-#021-H-Reg)

Another respondent asked:

> WHY did I receive my placement 2 days prior to the start of the school year? "Welcome to LUSD. You have 2 days to get your class ready and make up some lesson plans for your grade level that you've NEVER taught." (1993-#108-E-Reg)

Although we have no evidence that beginning teachers in LUSD were given a teaching assignment outside their <u>licensed</u> grade level or content area, comments of some respondents did suggest that their assignments may not have been their preference or related to their previous experience, especially as a teacher education student. This is supported by the comments of two middle school respondents. One respondent wrote, "I was thrown into a situation in which [sic] I was totally unprepared for. I wanted to teach Primary & instead, got a middle school position. I had never taught middle school before . . . . (1992-#076-M-Reg). A second respondent blames limited preparation for this problem: "While I am certified [grades] 6-12 the bulk of my experience was in high school curriculum. I don't think I was properly prepared for middle school curriculum, especially 6th grade" (1992-#308-M-Reg). In LUSD, teachers are hired with the intention of placing them at a grade level or in a subject area for which they are certified; only rarely are teachers hired for a specific teaching assignment in a specific school. However, as the two preceding comments suggest, such a policy may foster disappointment (or resentment) at being given a teaching assignment which does not match very well one's preference or one's classroom experiences.

A third cause of dissatisfaction with LUSD placement procedures deals with the type of school or school environment in which beginning teachers are placed. One beginning teacher assigned to an alternative high school wrote:

> My first-year experience has been very disheartening. I think it is bad policy to put a beginning teacher into an alternative school. Other than occasional contacts with my mentor teacher and my supervisor from LUSD, I feel very isolated from my profession. (1994-#267-H-Reg)

An elementary teacher points to dissatisfaction in being assigned to a difficult school:

> I have a hard time understanding why LUSD would put a fresh, motivated teacher, like myself, into one of the harshest schools in LUSD. I love the challenge, mind you, but I hate feeling burnt-out after my first year of teaching. (1994-#108-E-Reg)

A number of respondents cited inadequate preparation for teaching generally or for teaching in an urban environment specifically as the source of significant difficulties for them during their first year of teaching. Sometimes they criticized their preparation for teaching as poor (especially with respect to classroom management and discipline strategies) but at other times respondents suggested that no preparation could have been adequate. For example, a middle school teacher wrote, "I don't feel that there really is any possible way college can prepare someone for teaching" (1992-#098-M-Reg). Some respondents suggested that their preparation had been very satisfactory. As one elementary teacher wrote, "The teaching strategies I learned in college helped tremendously" (1994-#133-E-Reg). The perception that preparation for teaching in <u>urban</u> schools was inadequate was also evident in some comments. One middle school teacher wrote:

> I feel that there aren't any classes that prepare you for inner-city teaching. My education from [institution] was very good but they had no insight as to what is happening in the city schools. (1992-#025-M-Reg)

Another respondent also suggested that first hand familiarity with the city of Longman, in itself, was not helpful, writing:

> I feel [institution] did not fully prepare me for the experiences which occur every day. I needed more education about what to expect about parents, homelife [sic], and African American culture. I even grew up in Longman and am still in shock! (1992-#338-E-Reg)

Sixteen percent of the problems cited by the respondents focused on the lack of an orientation (or "handbook") regarding LUSD policies and procedures, inadequate resources or a poor working environment. Frequently, the respondents indicated that this problem may have occurred because they began their assignment after the start of the school year. One middle school teacher wrote:

> I came/was hired a few days into term 1 and was never given an orientation as to rules, procedures, etc. There's been no handbook. Sometimes I've "made mistakes as I go" and that's how I've learned. (1992-#041-M-Reg)

Similarly, an elementary teacher indicated learning about policies and procedure primarily through experience:

> Because I began my assignment in December I received no orientation in policy and procedure for discipline, field trip planning, ordering a sub [substitute teacher] & filling out forms when attending workshops. All of this was learned as a result of ERRORS [sic]. It has been <u>very</u> frustrating. (1992-#257-E-Reg)

Some respondents referred to a lack of resources or an undesirable working environment, ranging from meager resources to entering a "stripped down" room:

> I came into an empty classroom, no furniture except desks, no materials, no tables, <u>nothing</u> [sic]. I survived because of the generosity of my fellow teachers & because I became very pushy. A teacher with less life experiences, right out of college, would have never survived. (1993-#141-E-Spe)

However, one respondent, coming from a private school setting, found resources to be very good comparably: "LUSD seemed rich with materials and services in comparison" (1992-#114-M-Reg).

Sources of Support

In completing the open-ended item(s) on the surveys, LUSD beginning teachers often described their sources of support during their first year of teaching. Table 3 displays a summary of the analysis of their comments. Across the three years, mentor teachers in the LUSD Mentor Program were mentioned as the most frequent source of support. Keeping in mind that unlike the 1992 and 1993 surveys, the 1994 survey specifically prompted the respondents to discuss their mentor teacher, the positive value of mentor

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Insert Table 3 about here

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teachers for the beginning teachers is clear. Many of the comments of the respondents about their mentor teachers were strongly stated and emotionally charged:

> I owe my sanity at the end of my 1st year to [name], my mentor teacher! (1992-#098-M-Reg)
>
> If it had not been for the mentor teacher program, I would have quit in October! This program is a nessecity [sic] for keeping new teachers. (1993-#157-E-Reg)

At the same time, there were a few negative comments about mentor teachers, including that of an elementary teacher who wrote, "I was given a mentor teacher by the [school] board, but found this service to be unhelpful to say the least and intrusive at most" (1992-#128-E-Spe).

In the 1994 Beginning Teacher Survey, respondents who were identified by LUSD as having been assigned a mentor teacher were asked to indicate how working with a mentor teacher during their first year had made a difference. Similarly, respondents who were identified by LUSD as not having worked with a mentor teacher were asked to suggest how working with a mentor teacher might

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have made a difference in their first year. Table 4 and Table 5 display a summary of the analysis of these comments.

Among the 1994 Beginning Teacher Survey respondents who worked with a mentor teacher, 79% indicated that their first year had been better because of their mentor teacher. This level of satisfaction was quite consistent at different levels, with 78% of elementary teachers, 80% of middle school

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Insert Table 4 about here

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teachers and 86% of high school teachers indicating a high level of satisfaction in working with a mentor teacher. The respondents' comments revealed how highly they valued this source of support:

> My mentor helped me endure the ordeal. She also was wonderful and did all she could while I worked with administrators that were very unhelpful. (1994-#105-E-Spe)
>
> I think that I would have been lost without my mentor's assistance - especially in the beginning of the year. (1994-#119-M-Reg)
>
> My mentor was my saving grace. She helped me to get through the difficult issues and students. Without her assistance I would have lost it. (1994-#185-E-Spe)
>
> Without a mentor I would have quit. (1994-#263-M-Reg)

Nineteen percent of respondents working with a mentor teacher indicated that their year was not better because of their mentor teacher. A frequently given reason for this was the mentor teacher's unfamiliarity with the beginning teacher's grade level or content area. One middle school teacher's comments are representative of this concern: "My "mentor" was of no help to me what-so-ever [sic]. She dropped in once in awhile - usually just to give me some worksheet masters that were not age-appropriate" (1994-#104-E-Reg). Other respondents suggested that a mentor teacher was unnecessary in a school with a supportive staff, as evident in this respondent's remarks: "Although I was assigned a mentor, I rarely saw her in our school. . . . I felt that there

was really no need for a "mentor" from outside of the school. I was surrounded with unlimited support from within" (1994-#135-E-Reg). Only infrequently did respondents suggest that there was a personality conflict or a difference of values between themselves and their mentor teachers. One elementary teacher observed:

> In retrospect, I realize that I should have switched mentors, because our personalities didn't mesh well. I feel I would have gotten more out of the year with a person I felt more comfortable with and who acted more supportive than the person I had as a mentor. (1994-#231-E-Reg)

Among 1994 Beginning Teacher survey respondents not working with a mentor teacher, 61% of them suggested that they believed their first year would have been better if they had worked with a mentor teacher, whereas 27%

Insert Table 5 about here

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of these respondents suggested that their year would have been no different. The most common reason given for suggesting that working with a mentor teacher would not have made a difference was that a mentor teacher was not required in a supportive school environment. One elementary teacher specifically referred to a "buddy teacher": "I view the mentor program as a support mechanism. I received all the support I needed from my buddy teacher" (1994-#508-E-Reg). However, a middle school teacher not working with a mentor evidently had formulated a negative opinion of Mentor Program based on personal experiences: "Mentor Teachers stroll in when it's convenient for them, break appointments, etc." (1994-#483-M-Spe).

Prominent across all three years were the respondents' favorable comments about other teachers in general or a school's staff as a whole. Occasional references were made to colleagues who were assigned to work along with the beginning teachers in the High Scope early intention program (1994-#555-E-Reg) or to a "buddy teacher" within the building who assisted the beginning teacher (1993-#193-M-Reg).

Several respondents referred to their "good fortune" at having been placed in a particular school. "It was my good fortune to have been assigned to [name] Middle School," wrote one respondent, "where much consideration was given to my needs as a first year teacher. As a result, I look forward to the years ahead with enthusiasm" (1993-#197-M-Reg). Two elementary school teachers make very similar comments about different schools:

> I was very fortunate to be placed at [name]. I am part of a friendly, organized and disciplined school. Although my day allows a very small amount of time for interaction I feel that there is always someone around to ask for help. (1992-#128-E-Spe)
>
> I've been most impressed with the dedication and warmth among the staff at [name] School. There is excellent communication between the teachers, as well as between the teachers and the administration. People support one another through the frustrations and share in the successes. (1993-#113-E-Reg)

Many survey respondents identified other individuals, generally by job title, as having provided them with support and encouragement. For example, one middle school teacher wrote, "I feel very fortunate to have been placed in a school with a kind and concerned principal" (1992-#276-M-Reg). An elementary teacher noted that "The implementor, [name], has been a wonderful help to me!" (1992-#144-E-Reg). A physical education teacher wrote, "The support and sharing I have received from the entire Physical [sic] education department throughout LUSD has been tremendous. I have never felt alone and I knew who I could go to for information or support." This respondent also emphasized the help provided by one individual:

> At the beginning of the school year everything was heeped [sic] upon me and I was under a great deal of pressure by myself to excel. If it were not for the supportive efforts of [name] of P. E. office it would have been hell. As it turned out I was doing everything right; I just needed to hear it from an experienced professional. (1992-#336-E/M-Reg)

Finally, some respondents suggested that some students were also instrumental

in providing them with encouragement. "There are those students who come to school with a great desire to learn and be successful in everything they do," observed a high school teacher. "They make teaching worthwhile" (1993-#135-H-Reg).

Respondents attributed positive first-year experiences to two other sources. Some highlighted the value of LUSD workshops or inservices, including a middle school teacher who wrote, "We've had teacher workshops on Sat. mornings which have been very valuable" (1992-#041-M-Reg). Several respondents stressed previous experiences, especially in LUSD or in another urban school district, as particularly valuable. One elementary teacher wrote, "Having done my student teaching in LUSD schools, having taught in [outside the United States], and in a private, inner city school have all prepared me for working in LUSD much, much better than any college coursework could have" (1993-#235-E-Reg).

Mentor Teachers

In their comments during interviews, the mentor teachers regularly referred to five roles in which they saw themselves: counselor, resource person, helper, mediator and model. The role most prominently mentioned was that of *counselor*. Several of the mentor teachers emphasized their importance as a source of emotional support for the beginning teachers. For them, an important role of mentoring was to "work with beginning teachers, and just give them encouragement and listen to their frustrations and help them (M-14)." Mentor teachers for whom the counseling role was important stressed the techniques of nondirective listening and informal talk about a wide variety of issues.

Another important role, one that some mentor teachers did not anticipate, was that of *resource person*. "I'm spending time gathering materials and . . . carefully giving them out . . . following up on an idea that we've discussed, [and] then I might come back with a flyer or handout on it (M-19)," one mentor teacher noted. Mentor teachers repeatedly described ways in which they supplied information and curricular materials on their own

initiative.

When individual beginning teachers had difficulty in the classroom, some of the mentor teachers assumed the role of *helper*--someone who would directly intervene in a class, working with individual children or small groups to allow the beginning teacher to regroup or to concentrate on a lesson. "Sometimes I just bodily take my chair and sit next to a student for maybe 20 minutes or so and as they're doing math or whatever, just sort of keep that child on task (M-14)," said one mentor teacher.

Some mentor teachers reported that they intervened between a beginning teacher and a colleague or administrator on occasion. The role of *mediator* was an extension of the counselor role; it enabled mentor teachers to reduce their beginning teachers' stress and uncertainty. This role was enhanced by the independence the mentor teachers enjoyed from the politics of individual schools in the design of the program. As one mentor teacher put it, "I try to work as an intermediary if they have problems in the building. . . . an example: first year teachers find it very difficult to talk with administrators. I can help them with that (M-01)."

Finally, many of the mentor teachers said that they served as a *model* for the beginning teachers, conducting demonstration lessons as the beginning teachers observed. Mentor teachers considered this role to be not just a good way to share their knowledge with beginning teachers, but also as a way to "keep their hand in" teaching and to glean some of the small personal rewards of working directly with children.

It is informative to compare the mentor teachers' perceptions of their roles with the beginning teachers' reports of kinds of help they sought from their mentor teachers and from others during their first year. Consistent

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Insert Table 6 about here

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with the mentor teachers' most prominent comment about their role, the beginning teachers' most frequently cited kind of help in written comments on

their surveys was support, encouragement or someone to listen. Thirty-seven percent of the beginning teachers who worked with a mentor teacher mentioned this as a valuable role for a mentor teacher. Two other frequently mentioned kinds of support, providing resources (materials) or teaching ideas, were mentioned by 13% and 11% of the beginning teachers respectively, which was also consistent with a frequently reported self-perception among the mentor teachers.

Beginning teachers' perceptions diverged from those of mentor teachers, however, in some of the other roles. For example, whereas the mentor teachers seemed to feature modeling and direct involvement with the beginning teachers students prominently in their descriptions of their roles, these were much less frequently cited functions in the beginning teachers' comments. Conversely, few mentor teachers emphasized their role in providing information about school policies and procedures, even though 11% of the beginning teachers who wrote comments mentioned this as an important function of mentor teachers. (Beginning teachers who did not work with a mentor teacher differed in their perceptions from those who had a mentor teacher, mentioning policies and procedures much more frequently than the mentored teachers did as an area where they needed help.)

There are several ways to account for these differences. Mentor teachers, with their years of experience, had somewhat different values than their less experienced colleagues, and emphasized mentor functions such as teaching and working directly with children that were personally meaningful to them, though these function may not have appeared so helpful to the beginning teachers. This points out the need within the mentoring situation to consider the interests of and the benefits to the mentor teacher from the relationship. In general, despite some role confusion related in some cases to poor communication with administrators, mentor teachers as well as beginning teachers gained something from the program, perhaps insight about teaching, new career directions, or the day-to-day rewards of working with children.

Principals

Along with the main participants of the program, the beginning teachers and the mentor teachers, the building principals also have a vested interest in the mentoring program. Surveys of the district principals all three years showed fairly similar responses. Although the number of respondents was different for each year, the distribution by assignment levels was nearly the same, as can be seen in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 about here

Table 7 also shows that the principals were, for the most part, enthusiastic about the mentor program, with the vast majority indicating they would like to have mentor teachers work with beginning teachers in their buildings. Comments from principals who did not want to use the services of a mentor teacher from the program generally fell into three categories: (1) the building had an internal mentoring program, (2) there had been problems with one specific mentor teacher in the past, or (3) the principal felt that the program was too costly.

There was a noticeable increase from 1993 to 1994 in numbers of principals who indicated a desire to use the services of a mentor teacher. This may be due to the fact that more of the respondents in 1994 had mentor teachers working with beginning teachers in their building and, thus, had more first hand knowledge of the program. Changes in the principals' overall opinions about the program generally reflected an improved attitude about it in 1994. Frequently principals who indicated that their opinion was unchanged stated that their opinion had always been very favorable.

In spite of the very positive opinions about the program and the expression of how desperately a program for new teachers is needed, principals continued to highlight their lack of input in the process. Principals were asked to rank, from 1(none) to 5(extensive), their involvement in eight different aspects of the program: composition and selection of the Mentor

Board, definition of the Mentor Board's role, selection of schools participating in the program, selection of mentor teachers, training of mentor teachers, selection of beginning teacher for pairing with a mentor teacher, day-to-day operation of the program and program evaluation. In every year and in every category the average ranking was less than 2, indicating that principals who did not sit on the Mentor Board had little direct involvement with the program.

Additionally, principals were asked to pick three areas in which they thought their input was essential. The results are given in Table 8. The most common response was that principals wanted to be involved in the selecting which beginning teachers would take part in the program. If the program could not assign a mentor teacher to every beginning teacher, or every teacher in need of help, principals felt they were in the best position to decide who needed a mentor teacher and who did not. The second and third most common responses in all three years were the need to be involved in evaluation of the program and in the selection of mentor teachers, respectively.

Insert Table 8 about here

Finally, principals' comments were recorded and sorted for recurring responses, as displayed in Table 9. The most common responses were praise for the program and/or positive comments about individual mentor teachers. However, comments were also made regarding instances when the principal was dissatisfied with the mentor teacher's actions, a mismatch between the mentor

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Insert Table 9 about here

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teacher's area of expertise and the beginning teachers assignment, the lack of progress made by the beginning teacher who worked with a mentor teacher and the costliness of the program. Another category of responses was a reiteration of areas in which the principals would like greater input such as

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in making selections of needy beginning teachers to participate.

With respect to suggestions for enlarging or improving the Mentor Program, principals indicated a desire to add more mentor teachers to meet the needs of all beginning teachers, new to the profession or just new to the system, and possibly to help teachers in their second or third year as well. Repeatedly, in their survey comments and in phone interviews in 1992, principals mentioned the need for better communication among all constituencies of the program. The need to get information to and from the Mentor Board was vital to understanding the principal's role and getting valuable feedback to the Mentor Board. The principal representation on the Mentor Board did not seem to be, in fact, representative. In addition, principals were confused as to how much information regarding the progress and problems of the beginning teacher was allowed to be shared with them. Principals expressed that the confidential nature of the mentor-protege relationship did not allow the principal to address some of the beginning teacher's needs that were really their responsibility.

Mentor Board

The Mentor Board consisted of principals and Central Office personnel appointed by the district superintendent, teachers and union officials appointed by the union officers or who volunteered, and a mentor teacher representative. Interviews conducted in 1992 with Mentor Board members allowed a picture of the fundamental philosophy and structure of the program to be drawn. Members were fairly consistent in their descriptions of the process of designing the program, recruiting and selecting mentor teachers, and bargaining for program funding. They acknowledged setting extremely high standards for mentor teachers and proceeding with a rigorous selection process they felt was as consistent, unbiased and nonpolitical as possible. The result was a mix of men and women with teaching experiences in elementary, middle and high school as well as a mix of majority and minority ethnic backgrounds within the first cadre of mentor teachers.

The most direct contact that the Mentor Board made was with the mentor

teachers themselves. A representative of the mentor teachers was present at each Mentor Board meeting and a representative of the Mentor Board attended all mentor teacher group meetings. The Mentor Board saw its role as including oversight and evaluation of the program as well as administration and procurement of funding. Increasingly over the three years, members of the Mentor Board and mentor teachers became active in presenting overviews of the LUSD Mentor Program at the meetings of state, regional and national professional organizations, thereby adding to their responsibilities the dissemination of information about the Mentor Program to their responsibilities. The underlying reason for having a Mentor Board to administer this program was to ensure equal empowerment of teachers and administration. Since the negotiation process brought about a quick agreement on the continued funding of this program, it would appear that this goal had been met.

Conclusion

Based on the data gathered in this study, beginning teachers, mentors, principals and Mentor Board members seem to agree on several points. First, a program such as this demonstrates the district's commitment to supporting beginning teachers. Monetarily, both teachers and administrators are willing to allocate resources to fund the project. But more importantly, they are willing to work together to set reasonable and humane standards for beginning teachers and mentor teachers. Both aspects help all teachers feel more welcome, appreciated, empowered and professional in whatever role they play in the schools.

Secondly, nearly all the teachers, mentor teachers, principals and Mentor Board members felt that help such as this should be available to anyone who needs it. Many people, especially mentor teachers and Mentor Board members, indicated that this program, now in its infancy, could grow to be even more useful and meaningful to the district. They saw the program growing in numbers and in scope. Also, the hope was expressed that this type of shared government could be a model for other projects in the district.

Beginning teachers, mentor teachers and principals were able to make a direct connection between mentoring beginning teachers and better learning for students. Mentor teachers considered their clients to be the children as much or even more than the beginning teachers. Similarly, the role of the mentor teacher was seen by all to be more than simply providing resources or a good listener. The mentor teacher provided feedback on teaching performance and class management, a model to follow, a guide through mounds of paperwork and assurance that all teachers have the same fears and problems.

Table 1

Number of Beginning Teacher Survey Respondents Completing Open-Ended Survey Item(s)

Level	1992		1993		1994		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Elementary	51	48	86	70	91	53	228	57
Middle	41	38	24	20	56	33	121	30
High	12	11	9	7	19	11	40	10
Other	3	3	3	2	5	3	11	3
Total	107	100	122	99	171	100	400	100

Table 2

Perceived Problems of Beginning Teacher Survey Respondents Completing Open-Ended Item(s)

Problem	1992 n	1992 %	1993 n	1993 %	1994 n	1994 %	Total n	Total %
Classroom management and discipline	11	11	14	16	20	22	45	16
System assignment procedure /when assigned	12	12	15	17	14	15	41	14
No orientation to procedures, resources; no handbook	9	9	11	13	8	9	28	10
Lack of resources, poor working environment	10	10	4	5	4	4	18	6
Poor student motivation, high absenteeism, negative attitudes	10	10	5	6	3	3	18	6
Students' disrespect, verbal and physical abuse	5	5	7	8	4	4	16	6
System assignment procedure /content area or grade level	8	8	4	5	3	3	15	5
Poor college preparation for teaching	4	4	4	5	7	8	15	5
Lack of parental support	5	5	5	6	4	4	14	5
Poor communication among teachers and administrators	4	4	1	1	6	6	11	4
Excessive paperwork, red tape	3	3	2	2	5	5	10	4
Poor preparation for teaching in multicultural, urban school	7	7	3	3	0	0	10	4
System residency requirement	2	2	4	5	4	4	10	4
Other (ten problems cited total of nine or fewer times for all years)	14	13	8	9	11	12	33	12
Total	104	103	87	101	93	100	284	101

Table 3

Perceived Sources of Support of Beginning Teacher Survey Respondents Completing Open-Ended Item(s)

	1992		1993		1994		Total	
Source of Support	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mentor teacher or mentor program	9	19	20	19	55	46	84	31
Other teachers (in general or as part of "team," "unit," "pod," etc., "buddy teacher"	8	17	21	20	23	19	52	19
School "staff"	9	19	16	15	15	13	40	15
Principal, vice-principal, assistant principal	6	13	15	14	7	6	28	10
Previous experience (including student teaching and substitute teaching in system)	3	6	6	6	9	8	18	7
Central Office personnel (e.g., supervisor)	2	4	7	7	3	3	12	4
Inservices and workshops	3	6	8	8	1	1	12	4
Students	3	6	4	4	3	3	10	4
Other (five sources cited total of nine or fewer times for all years)	5	10	8	8	3	3	16	6
Total	48	100	105	101	119	102	272	100

Table 4

Effect of Mentor Teacher as Reported by 1994 Beginning Teacher Survey Respondents Working with a Mentor Teacher

Level	Better	Worse or No Difference	Unsure	Total
	n	n	n	n
Elementary	39	10	1	50
Middle	16	4	0	20
High	6	1	0	7
Other	1	0	0	1
Total	62	15	1	78

Table 5

Effect of Mentor Teacher as Predicted by 1994 Beginning Teacher Survey Respondents NOT Working with a Mentor Teacher

Level	Better	No Difference	Unsure	Total
	n	n	n	n
Elementary	24	8	5	37
Middle	22	9	1	32
High	4	2	4	10
Other	0	3	0	3
Total	50	22	10	82

Table 6

Perceptions of the Ways in Which a Mentor Teacher is or Might be Helpful as Reported by 1994 Beginning Teacher Survey Respondents

Area of Help	Respondents Working with Mentor Teacher		Respondents not Working with Mentor Teacher	
	n	%	n	%
Support, encouragement, listener	42	37	10	13
Providing resources, materials	15	13	11	14
Providing information on policies, procedures, expectations	12	11	26	33
Sharing ideas about curriculum and teaching techniques	12	11	15	19
Friendship, sharing personal experiences	5	4	0	0
Help with classroom management and discipline	5	4	5	6
Serving as bridge or connection to others	5	4	1	1
Observing teaching, providing feedback	5	4	3	4
Help with organization	4	4	2	3
Help with planning and lesson plans	3	3	3	4
Modeling teaching and management techniques	2	2	1	1
Enable beginning teacher to observe other teachers	2	2	0	0
Helping beginning teacher's students directly	1	1	0	0
Helping beginning teacher not working with a mentor teacher indirectly through beginning teacher who is working with a mentor teacher	0	0	2	3
Total	113	100	79	101

Table 7

Principal Survey Response Demographics

	1992		1993		1994	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Building Assignment						
High school	10	10	7	9	10	10
Middle school	16	16	15	19	16	16
Elementary school	76	74	57	70	67	69
Other	1	1	2	2	4	4
Total	103	101	81	100	97	99
Presently Working with Mentor Teachers						
Yes	52	50	46	57	63	65
No	51	50	31	38	27	28
No response	0	0	4	5	1	1
Have different program	0	0	0	0	6	6
Total	103	100	81	100	97	100
Would Like Mentor Teachers for Next Year						
Yes	90	87	70	86	90	93
No	4	4	3	4	3	3
No response	9	9	8	10	4	4
Total	103	100	81	100	97	100
How has Your Opinion of the Program Changed						
Much less positive	-	-	3	4	4	4
Somewhat less positive	-	-	24	30	9	9
No change	-	-	26	32	37	38
Somewhat more positive	-	-	0	0	20	21
Much more positive	-	-	18	22	13	13
No response	-	-	10	12	14	14
Total	-	-	81	100	97	100

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Table 8

Principal's Response to Desired Involvement in the Mentor Teacher Program

Types of involvement	1992 n	1992 %	1993 n	1993 %	1994 n	1994 %
Composition and selection of the Mentor Board	13	14	9	13	11	13
Definition of Mentor Board role in the program	21	22	18	25	8	9
Selection of schools participating in program	25	26	18	25	26	30
Selection of mentor teachers participating in program	34	35	21	29	43	49
Training of mentor teachers participating in program	25	26	12	17	23	26
Selection of beginning teachers participating	73	76	56	78	56	64
Day-to-day operation of the program	24	25	14	19	23	26
Program evaluation	60	63	46	64	50	57
Total*	96		72		87	

* Based on the number of responses to this item, not all respondents completed this section. Each respondents was asked to indicate up to three areas and therefore total percentage is greater than 100%.

Table 9

Summary of Comments from Principal Surveys

	1992		1993		1994	
Comments	n	%	n	%	n	%
Positive comments						
Experience was a positive influence on school	5	15	-	-	4	13
Individual mentor teacher was great	5	15	3	16	2	6
Beginning teacher benefited greatly from program	-	-	-	-	2	6
Always had a positive view of program	-	-	-	-	3	9
Will encourage beginning teacher to participate	-	-	-	-	1	3
Negative comments						
Communication was problem	5	15	2	11	3	9
Mentor teacher provided no help	1	3	-	-	-	-
Mentor teachers too late	1	3	-	-	-	-
Program is too costly	2	6	2	11	-	-
Mentor teachers did not have expertise in areas helpful to the teacher	1	3	1	5	-	-
Had positive view which changed	-	-	2	11	1	3
Mentor teacher should model teaching not just to provide materials	-	-	1	5	1	3
Suggestions to improve program						
Mentoring is necessary for all beginning teachers	3	9	-	-	3	10
Should be available for all teachers who need help	1	3	-	-	5	16
Not all beginning teachers need help	4	12	1	5	-	-
Principals need input into the selection of mentor teachers	2	6	1	5	-	-
Have own mentoring program	1	3	2	11	-	-
What about student teachers?	1	3	-	-	-	-
Principals should pick and pair teachers for program	2	11	3	10	-	-
Need more mentor teachers	-	-	-	-	2	6
Total*	33		19		31	

* Based on only additional written comments.

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